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KEYTESVILLE, MO

Thinking Themes

BY DR. FRANK CRANE

Doubtless each of us knows some one, in his circle of acquaintances, who is intellectually contrary. Such a one delights to take on every occasion the opposite side. If he is in a religious community, he will take stand firmly for atheism; if he is among scoffers, he will argue just as valiantly for the church. He is like the proverbial Irishman who on landing at New York, asked, "Have yez a Government here?" "Yes." "Then I'm fernist it." He is a standing minority report. He is a crooked stick that will not lie in the woodpile. Like Goethe's Devil, he is the spirit who constantly denies—stets verneint.

This class of persons is a steady, normal crop in the field of humanity. We would not get along without them.

They keep the kettle of things stirred, which otherwise would settle and spoil. These are they that keep the course of social life pure as a running stream, and prevent it from booming like a green, stagnant pool.

They supply ginger for political campaigns. They are the party out of power. They are the watchdogs of progress.

Without them religion would harden into a cruel tyranny of superstition; falsehoods would be crystallized in power; and ancient fraud live forever. They harass mankind into being honest.

Perhaps the greatest exponent of this kind combined mule and

dog element in human nature, the man who with genius and power set himself directly against all that the world had learned of religion, of government and of art, leader of all idol-smashers, who defended tyranny, immortality and selfishness with all the resources of philosophy, he who was the bitterest tonic in all literatures, greatest of anti-Christians, was Frederic Nietzsche.

What ails this free land of ours is not so much the high cost of living as the high cost of parasites. It's a very poor family nowadays that can't afford a leech in skirts or a leech in trousers.

"The bread that mother used to make" has gone out of style along with the "work that father used to do." It is possible that neither is to be greatly regretted, but a goodly part of the present generation has failed to provide a most necessary substitute.

Let's tell the truth about it. Father and mother are to blame. They have been trying to make their progeny ladies and gentlemen when they should have tried to make them useful. Daughter must not soil her hands in the kitchen, sewing is the work of dependents and it isn't quite the thing for even a poor girl to know how to manage her own house. There isn't anything in the society columns about housework, and the "first aid to the injured hearts" department doesn't have anything to say about mending clothes, although it may have a good deal to say about wearing them.

We are rapidly developing a leisure moneyed class, and Mary Ann may be as poor as a church mouse, but mother is determined that she shall marry into the "class above." Hence, no work for Mary Ann.

Charles James must do nothing to spoil Mary Ann's chances, so he doesn't get a job in the foundry or planing mill. He goes to work in a department store where he can wear neatly pressed trousers, a dinky bow tie and queer looking hat. Going out on the train, he gives his unsuspecting seat-mate the idea that he's in Wall Street. It takes all that he makes to keep him in fussy togs, and all that dad can save above his life insurance premiums to keep Mary Ann presentable.

When Mary Ann marries she doesn't know the meaning of the word economy, and when her husband, who after all isn't of the leisure class, suggests a little management in the house, he's a tight wad and Mary Ann begins to wonder how long it will be before he will be earning enough to support himself and pay alimony.

Charles James marries a girl as unfitted for marriage as Mary Ann, and it's not long before the new household is wrecked on the rocks of extravagance.

What we need is not so much a lower cost of living, but a higher standard of usefulness. We

are not so much in need of better clothes as of better consciences. We need not so much to reduce prices as to elevate ideals.

The average man nowadays can sustain a proper family burden as the average man always could. The average man cannot now, nor can he ever, sustain a more than average burden in the shape of human parasites. The wife who neglects her home duties, the daughter who leaves the servants to work that the old-fashioned girl did for herself, the son who cannot or does not make his own living, are parasites—nothing more or less.

The cure for the parasite is the gospel of work. So long as work is so widely regarded as the punishment of the poor, and profitless idleness the reward of the rich, it won't do much good to regulate the cost of human necessities. The trouble lies with the man and woman, not with what they eat, drink and wear.

There is an almost irresistible impulse to exaggerate any item of sex or of alcohol. Anything surprising put in these categories is subject to 50 per cent discount. We all love to shock, and there are no such shockers as the two forms indicated.

One of the principles of historical criticism is to reject, at least to suspect, any incident related, in proportion as it is interesting. The rule rests on the solid foundation that when the narrator strains to make an impression he is likely to look away from facts to effects.

The sex-anecdote and rum-revelator is a natural born liar. He sins as the sparks fly upward. He fabricates thrills as unconsciously, mendaciously and piously as the medieval historians manufactured miracles.

I abhor the village pessimist and his estimate of women. The average remark, "They say—he drinks!" is fetid with the smell of false witness. The most abhorrent thing about being respectable is the way you are forced to listen to lies about those that don't belong.

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When a couple turn from the altar—man and wife—Cupid is supposed to have done his part of the bargain. He does not concern himself further with the affairs. They are supposed to live happily ever after. In this surmise Cupid shows himself to be a bit old fashioned. He can not keep pace with the present day marriages. He should certainly keep abreast of the times, if not a little ahead of them, for these are forcible times in the turn of the marriage market. The shrewdest speculator is liable to overreach himself in conclusions as to how they will turn out. Most profound study has been given to every law which governs the people—their prosperity and happiness. But the one great law which deals with marriage is outraged oftenest, with impunity.

It is seldom the working man who offends in this respect. When he plights his vow at the altar he clings to the object of his choice 'til death doth part them. The man of great wealth is in many instances more flip-pant in his wooing. He knows if he grows weary of the heart-mate whom he has chosen he can find the way and means to sever the bonds, even though she is the mother of his children. The world of women envy the wives of rich men. But there is often a side to their lives so dark that the poorest laborer's wife would not change places with them at the cost of a broken heart.

The wife of many a millionaire never knows how long her lease of wedded life and happiness is to last. It is such wives who cry out against the laxity of laws which govern divorce. They pray heaven for a great and glorious change in the making of them. There always have been and always will be men who are inconsistent in love, though the marriage tie binds them. Even they would hesitate to go through the divorce court if the law was such that it took five years and the best of reasons to be entitled to a decree of divorce. There should be widespread publicity regarding each and every divorce. A clause should be attached that they should not remarry if they have been proven guilty of grave misdemeanor.

The saddest of all is the severing of home ties where there are children looking up into the faces of father and mother who are drifting apart. They must needs take sides with one or the other. The world's criticism is cruel for them to hear. In addition to the load of sorrow in their hearts, they must face the truth that there are people who will not hesitate to affirm, with a sneer: "Like parent, like child."

The man who forces his wife to divorce him wrings not only her heart, but those to whom she is dear. Perhaps an aged father and mother, who sit by their lonely fireside in the evening of their lives, are broken-hearted over the mispent life of the child they love. In the bitterness of their souls they cry out: "Why are divorcees so easily obtainable? Oh, for a better law, which would protect the innocent."

Generally the man of great wealth who forces a loyal, true wife who is no longer young, to divorce him has in the background a younger, fairer woman in view to wed quite as soon as the bonds are sundered. He forgets how the old wife saved and plodded with him in the early days. It was her saving of the dimes, perhaps, that laid the foundation of his fortune. He counted the pennies which she spent, but he does not stop to count the many thousands which he showers upon the newer love.

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upon humanity at large if they elected men strong enough of purpose to stamp out the divorce evil as it now stands, amending the law that it might work for the purpose that it was originally intended. Heart blights caused by the spreading epidemic of divorce fever should be stamped out.

Marriage is not a tryout. Those whom God hath joined together should never be put asunder. All the possibilities of a drama may be brought out in a tryout, but on the stage of married life there can be no tryouts. The curtain of marriage should not be rung down until the close of wedded life.

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